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BLACK WIDOW

DEADLY ORIGIN

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PREVIOUSLY IN

BLACK WIDOW

DEADLY ORIGIN

All little Natalia Romanova grew up knowing was combat and espionage, training that made her a highly skilled and dangerous Russian spy. But, in the ruins of postwar Berlin, even she couldn't prevent her friend and mentor, Ivan, from being fatally wounded. He was saved by the Soviets, who gave both Ivan and Natalia a serum that extended their lifespans indefinitely.

Now, Ivan has finally met his demise, the victim of a brutal and bizarre murder. Before his mysterious end, he warned Natalia about "The Icepick Protocol," which would kill everyone she had ever cared for. When Natalia investigated, she found her old friend's body – but, disturbingly, not his head.

After breaking into a Russian command post, Natalia uncovered the truth about her past. Years earlier, she had been injected with nanites, and unwittingly spread them to all her friends, allies, and lovers. These tiny particles can be manipulated to force their hosts into a homicidal rage at the controller's whim. The unknown assailant's first target: Clint Barton, a.k.a. Ronin (formerly Hawkeye), former boyfriend and teammate...

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JAMES BARNES' APARTMENT, TEMPORARY H.Q. OF THE AVENGERS. THE PRESENT DAY. POTENTIAL VICTIMS: CLINT BARTON AND BOBBI MORSE.

KREESH

NO!

THIS THING ISN'T GOING TO GET *YOU* TOO!

ZKOW

'TASHA?!

WHAT--

QUIET, PLEASE, CLINT--

--I'M--

CRACK

--WORKING.

WHUD

I JUST LEARNED I'VE PASSED *NANITES* TO EVERYONE I WAS CLOSE TO, AND THEY PASSED THEM ON IN TURN TO THOSE CLOSE TO *THEM*. THEYRE BEING ACTIVATED TO CREATE A *PSYCHOTIC RAGE*.

PLEASE UNDERSTAND, BOBBI--

--THIS IS FOR YOUR *OWN GOOD*.

MHM!

WHAT *WAS* THAT?!

TELL ME SHE'S GOING TO BE *OKAY*.

HER PULSE IS NORMAL, SHE SHOULD WAKE SOON.

I'VE INJECTED MYSELF WITH *COUNTER-NANITES* SUPPLIED BY AN OLD FRIEND. THE KISS WAS THE QUICKEST WAY TO--

WELL...

...TOUCHING HER WITH MY PALM WOULD HAVE DONE IT, TOO. LIKE THIS.

BUT WHY DO WE WEAR THESE COSTUMES IF NOT FOR THE *THEATER?*

'TASHA...

I ONLY JUST GOT HER BACK.

I THOUGHT SHE WAS *DEAD*. AGAIN.

YOU BRING THIS TROUBLE TO MY DOOR, YOU *LAUGH* ABOUT IT...

IF THIS IS YOU TRYING TO *PROVOKE* ME AGAIN, LIKE IN THE OLD DAYS--

THAT'S *EXACTLY* THE REACTION THEY WERE AFTER, WHOEVER DID THIS.

"YOU CAN'T TRUST HER. SHE'S MESSED UP. *DIRTY.*"

YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW FAR IT'S GONE--

--WHY I *HAVE* TO LAUGH ABOUT IT.

"TONY STARK HAS DISAPPEARED. MAYBE A VICTIM OF THIS THING.

"IT GOT AN OLD FRIEND OF MINE. SHE'S A TEACHER NOW. OR SHE *WAS*.

"HER HUSBAND KILLED HER, THEN HIMSELF.

"THERE WAS A SMALL BOY WHO DELIVERED MY NEWSPAPER. I ALWAYS USED TO MUSS HIS HAIR--

"I COULDN'T EXPLAIN TO HIS MOTHER WHY SHE SAW MY FACE AS SHE STRANGLED HIM."

THEY REMOVED IVAN'S BRAIN, WE THINK, TO SCAN IT FOR DATA ABOUT THE TARGETS--

--SO THEY COULD TEASE THIS OUT, ONE BY ONE, NICE AND SLOW.

GOOD *TIMES*, EH?

SO FORGIVE ME IF I MAKE THE OCCASIONAL *JOKE*.

GOD, 'TASHA. WE'LL HELP YOU--

YOU CAN...

...BY LETTING ME DO THIS. NOT BY BEING A *SUPER HERO*.

LET ME GET HER BLOOD ANALYZED. WHEN I FIND OUT WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR SPREADING THE NANITES--

--I DOUBT I'LL ACT LIKE A SUPER HERO THEN.

TELL JAMES I'LL BE BACK TO SEE HIM LATER.

'TASHA--!

BEING A "*SUPER HERO*"...

...THAT'S WHAT *SAVED* YOU.

SAN FRANCISCO, THE APARTMENT OF MATT MURDOCK, DAREDEVIL. A FEW YEARS AGO.

BEING A COSTUMED ADVENTURER--

--IT FEELS...

GO ON, SAY "*DECADENT*" AGAIN.

IN YOUR ACCENT, IT TURNS ME ON.

I KNOW WHO YOU *ARE*, NATASHA.

JUST BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT THIS *FIXATION* THAT YOU'LL ALWAYS HURT THE ONES YOU LOVE--

MATT...

...I STILL FEEL MANIPULATED.

NOT BY *YOU*. YOU'VE LET ME START TO HEAL. BUT I'VE HAD MY MIND INTERFERED WITH SO MANY TIMES...

...I STILL FEEL LIKE THERE'S SOMETHING...

...I CAN'T TRUST.

'TASHA...MR. MURDOCK--

--THE TELEVISION NEWS SAYS THAT "THE OWL" AND "MR. HYDE" ARE ROBBING A BANK.

I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW.

ON OUR WAY! THANKS, IVAN!

I CAN SEE YOU'RE JUST *BRIMMING* WITH ENTHUSIASM!

<HE'S A *CHILD!*>*

<HUSH, IVAN--!>

<I FOLLOWED YOU TO THE U.S.A. TO LOOK AFTER YOU, 'TASHA-->

<NOT TO BE A...LIVE-IN CHAUFFEUR!>

*TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN.

<WHEN I ASKED YOU TO FIND SOMEONE WHOLE TO BE...>

<...DID IT HAVE TO BE A WESTERN SUPER HERO?>

<I THOUGHT *YOU AND I* COULD FIND...>

<...SOME SORT OF RESOLUTION...>

<...TOGETHER.>

NEW YORK. HELL'S KITCHEN. NOW.

THAT SEEMS LIKE SUCH A LONG TIME AGO.

YOU AND IVAN NEVER LIKED EACH OTHER. BACK WHEN YOU WERE SO CAREFREE.

YOU'VE BECOME RATHER MORE *LIKE* HIM NOW.

NATASHA...

I HAVE A LOT TO DO. TO PASS ON THIS CURE. TO STAY SAFE.

AND IF YOU MISS THOSE DAYS, REMEMBER--

--IT WAS *YOUR* CHOICE TO MOVE ON.

I GUESS NOW *I DO* KNOW HOW IVAN FELT.

AN HOUR LATER.

CLINT AND BOBBI SAID TO SAY "THANKS." THEY LOOKED KIND OF...*SHEEPISH.*

GOOD. IS SHE OKAY?

BACK TO HER OLD SELF. SHE SAID TO CALL HER IF YOU WERE STILL "*CURIOUS*," AND CLINT GOT ALL DEFENSIVE.

HAH!

DON'T YOU THINK KHRUSHCHEV WOULD HAVE LAUGHED TO SEE US NOW?

I GUESS WITH THE OLD SOVIET DIALECTIC--

--THEY LIKED US BEING *TWO THINGS.*

THE WINTER SOLDIER AND CAPTAIN AMERICA...

ONLY I'M *MORE* THAN TWO THINGS, JAMES. THIS PLAN SEEMS DESIGNED TO REMIND ME OF HOW... *SPLINTERED*...

YOU *COULD* BE...IF YOU WEREN'T SO *TOUGH.*

THANK GOODNESS YOU'RE IMMUNE.

GUESS THEY THOUGHT OF ME WHEN THEY DESIGNED THOSE THINGS.

LOGAN JUST GOT "SORT OF A HEADACHE."

I HAVE TO KEEP GOING, THERE ARE STILL LOTS OF--

VRRINNNG

EXCUSE ME...

HERCULES?! I'VE BEEN TRYING TO FIND YOU--

WHAT?!

MANHATTAN, THE GOLDEN FLEECE NIGHT CLUB.

IS THIS MOST *UNWORTHY* BATTLE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THAT *VISION* I JUST HAD OF YOU, NATASHA?

AS IN PAST DAYS, I AM NOT BENEATH ASKING SUCH A GREAT LEADER AS YOURSELF--

--FOR A LITTLE HELP, PLEASE!

LOS ANGELES, H.Q. OF THE CHAMPIONS SUPER TEAM. LEADER: NATALIA ROMANOVA. A FEW YEARS BACK.

THE OTHERS SAY THEY HAVE *LOST HEART*. NOT I. OF COURSE.

THIS TEAM JUST DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.

WHY *SHOULD* SUCH DISPARATE PEOPLE STAY TOGETHER?

BECAUSE WE'RE NOT "DISPARATE" AT ALL.

FOR THIS TOWN, WE'RE *TYPICAL!* HALF-GOD, HALF-DEMON, HALF-HUMAN, HALF-WESTERNER--

--OUT WEST TO SEEK OUR FORTUNE!

WHY SETTLE FOR BEING SUPER HEROES? WE SHOULD FOUND A *MOVIE STUDIO!*

THIS IS WHY THE SON OF ZEUS FAVORS YOU!

AS HIS LEADER, AS HIS COMPANION IN WINE AND SONG, AS HIS PARTNER--

"--IN THE *BASER* PLEASURES."

PRESENT DAY, AN HOUR LATER.

AH, IT *IS* JUST LIKE OLD TIMES.

THE SON OF ZEUS AND HIS LOVER AND GENERAL HAVE FELLED MANY FOES!

FORMER LOVER. JUST IN CASE YOU WERE ABOUT TO SUGGEST WE "*CELEBRATE.*" AND OF COURSE YOU WERE.

YOU CERTAINLY HAVE YOUR SHARE OF EX-GIRLFRIENDS.

BUT IN *YOUR* CASE, ALL THE STORIES ARE *JOLLY.*

BECAUSE I'M A MYTH.

BECAUSE YOU'RE A *MISTER.*

BUT IN THAT *MYTHOLOGICAL* WAY OF YOURS--

--I THINK THERE'S ONE MORE HEROIC THING YOU CAN DO FOR ME...

IF I WERE TO SET OFF ON A QUEST TO FIND THE SOURCE OF THIS EVIL...

...I FEEL IT WOULD SET SAIL...

...IN *THAT* DIRECTION.

The Golden Fleece

NOTHING VISIBLE, BUT THEN, THERE *WOULDN'T* BE.

IF I COMBINE THAT BEARING TOGETHER WITH HOW THE NANITES FROM BOBBI'S BLOOD LINE UP IF YOU PUT A CURRENT THROUGH THEM...

...I SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET A BEARING...

AH...

I MAY NOT KNOW *WHO* MY ENEMIES ARE--

--BUT THANKS TO YOU, NOW I KNOW *WHERE* THEY ARE.

THEN I FEAR FOR THEIR HEADS, THEIR LIMBS AND THEIR ORGANS OF GENERATION!

HERCULES! SURELY YOU DON'T THINK I WOULD EVER BE SO...

...MERCIFUL?

A SECRET LOCATION. NICK FURY, FORMER DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D., SPY CHIEF ON THE RUN. THE NEXT DAY.

DAMN IT, WIDOW!

I ALREADY GOT YOU THOSE COUNTER-NANITES! IF I GIVE YOU THE ACCESS CODES TO A H.A.M.M.E.R. GOVERNMENT LAUNCH FACILITY--

--IT'LL TIP THEM OFF TO JUST HOW MUCH WE KNOW ABOUT THEIR OPERATION.

AND THE REASON YOU'RE GETTING ANGRY IS...?

'CAUSE YOU GOT TO ME IN TIME TO SAVE ME FROM HAVING TO FIGHT SOME PEOPLE I CARE ABOUT.

SO I OWE YOU.

. AND SO, OBVIOUSLY--

--I'M GOING TO DO IT.

BESIDES, IF WE'RE EVER GONNA GET OUR COUNTRY BACK TO WHERE IT *SHOULD* BE, THERE'S GONNA COME A TIME WHEN WHAT YOU ARE IS *HONORED* AGAIN. I MEAN--

NEW YORK, AVENGERS MANSION.
A FEW YEARS AGO.

"--YOU BEING A FORMER LEADER OF THE AVENGERS."

<AND I'VE BEEN ELECTED TO *LEAD* THEM! IT'S A *HUGE* RESPONSIBILITY, BUT-->

<IT'S THE HIGHEST HONOR FOR A WESTERN SUPER HERO.>

<SO...>

<...YOUR JOURNEY IS OVER.>

<YOU HAVE HAD MANY ADOLESCENCES, MANY ADULTHOODS, MANY MATURITIES, AND IN THE END, YOU HAVE DECIDED TO BE ONE THING-->

<--*THIS* THING.>

<IVAN, WITH ALL YOUR INTELLIGENCE EXPERIENCE, YOU COULD BE A GREAT HELP, WITH THIS.>

<THAT WAS NOT MY CALLING.>

<MY JOB, MY FELLOW IMMORTAL, WAS TO WATCH OVER YOU, AND WAIT FOR-->

<--FOR YOU TO BE *HAPPY*.>

"<I WONDER, NATALIA, IF THAT WAS WHAT I WAS WAITING FOR, ALL THIS TIME?>

"<INSTEAD OF MAKING A LIFE OF MY *OWN*?>"

LONG ISLAND. N.O.M.A.D. LAUNCH FACILITY. PRESENT DAY.

PRE-FLIGHT CHECKS...DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS COCKPIT EVEN FROM INSIDE IT...OKAY. NEVERMIND!

TAKE-OFF!

FWAAM

LA GRANGE POINT ACHIEVED. STABLE EARTH ORBIT ATTAINED. STEALTH MODE ENGAGED.

I'M RECORDING THIS IN CASE I DON'T MAKE IT--

--BECAUSE THERE'S NOBODY TO HELP ME NOW.

I THINK MAYBE THIS IS THE POINT IN SPACE AND TIME I WAS ALWAYS *DESTINED* TO REACH--

--AND THE WORLD HAS TO BE TOLD--

"--ANOTHER INSANE MONSTER FROM THE PAST--

"--SOMETHING FROM THE SOVIET DRAWING BOARDS--

"--SOMEONE ACTUALLY *BUILT* IT.

"SOMEONE BUILT THE *DREADNOUGHT.*"

TRYING TO FILM THE DETAILS--

"--I SEE WHAT I SUPPOSE SHOULD BE CALLED IMPERIAL DYNAMOS.

"AS ALWAYS, KEEP THE TESTED DESIGN, CHANGE THE FLAG."

BUT NOBODY IN RUSSIAN POLITICS IS AN IMPERIALIST NOW.

AT LEAST NOT UNDER THE FLAG OF THE CZARS.

SO WHO WOULD [redacted] MAD ENOUGH TO--

OH...

NEW YORK. KENNEDY AIRPORT. A FEW YEARS AGO.

<YOU NEVER UNDERSTOOD...>

<I DIDN'T WANT TO [redacted] YOUR FATHER. OR YOUR GUARDIAN. OR YOUR UNCLE. OR YOUR FRIEND.>

<I WANTED *MORE* THAN THAT.>

<IF I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND...>

<...IT'S BECAUSE I *WANTED* THE FATHER, THE GUARDIAN, THE UNCLE AND THE FRIEND.>

<WELL, THEN-->

<--THERE'S OUR DIALECTIC. OUR CLASH OF *OPINIONS* FINALLY DEFINED.>

HA HA HA!

<AT LEAST NOW I KNOW-->

"<--WHY I KEPT HURTING MYSELF >"

IVAN.

OF COURSE IT'S YOU.

NEXT: YOU KNOW MY NAME.

FANTASTIC FOUR

ISSUE #575 PREVIEW

On Sale January 2010!

JONATHAN HICKMAN
DALE EAGLESHAM

THE BAXTER BUILDING.
NEW YORK CITY.

BAAAMMM!

POP

WELCOME TO THE BAXTER BUILDING, HOME OF THE...

ALERT: RECOGNITION OVERRIDE //HOSTILE IDENTIFIED//

SECURITY PARAMETERS COMING ONLINE.

WARNING!

"AUTHORITY FIGURES ARE BEING ALERTED."

WARNING!

SECONDS LATER...

I THINK THAT'S FAR ENOUGH!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

FANTASTIC NUMBERED FOUR...

I BRING YOU A MESSAGE FROM THE MOLE MAN.

SPIT IT OUT, BEFORE I KNOCK YOUR HEAD...

...BACK ON OR SOMETHIN'.

WELL?

PLEASE CLEAR THE LOBBY.

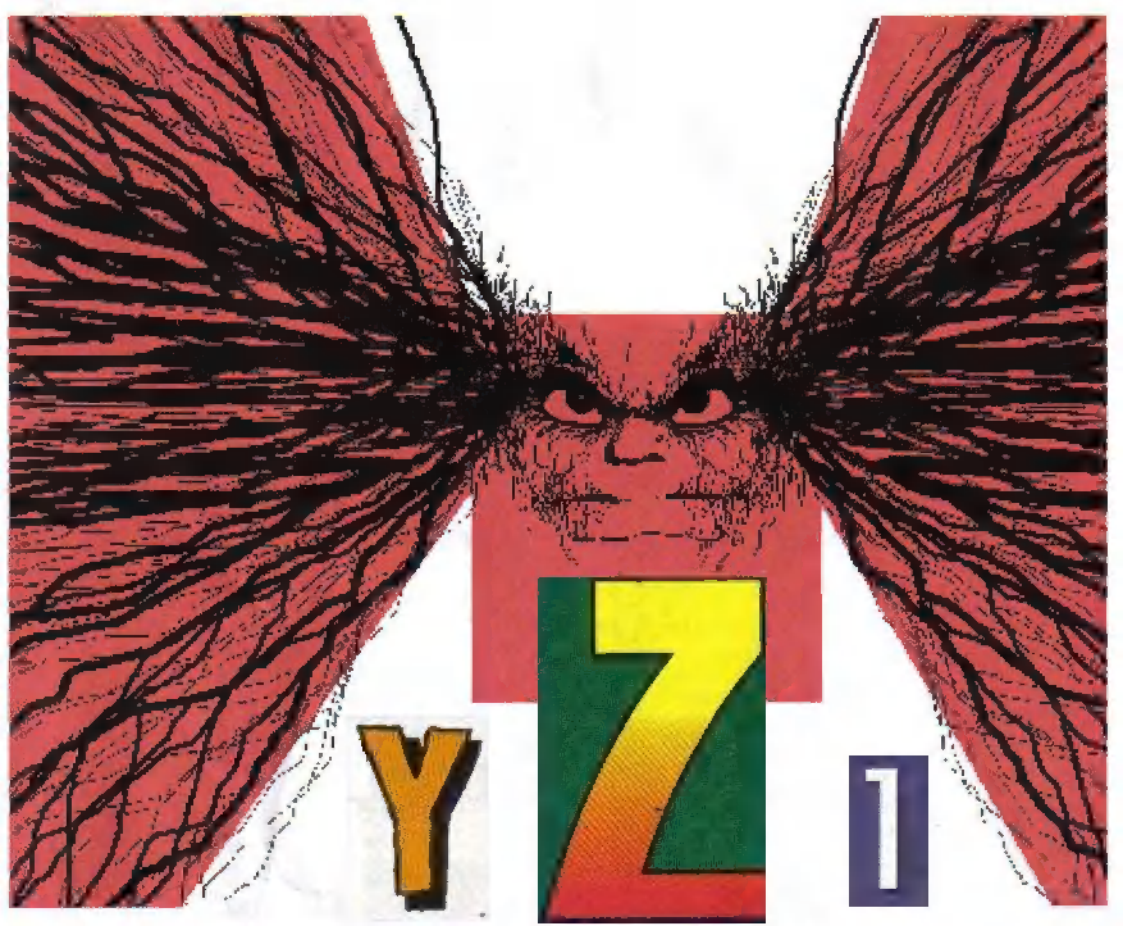
RRRUMMBLE

MY OLDEST OF ADVERSARIES...

THERE IS CHAOS IN THE UNDERWORLD... SUBTERRANEA IS IN PERIL...

AND I BELIEVE YOU ARE MY ONLY HOPE.

TO BE CONTINUED IN *FANTASTIC FOUR* #575!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